

# Teaming Up for Emergency Preparedness

## How to Create a Partnership between Your Public Health Agency and Area Hospitals



**Step 1. Understand the goal of a hospital–public health partnership.** The partnership allows the local public health agency and hospitals in its jurisdiction to coordinate their response to bioterror, mass casualty, or other public health emergencies.

**Step 2. Educate key decision makers in the participating organizations about the benefits of a partnership.**

**Step 3. Form a partnership working group.** Ask each area hospital and your public health agency to appoint several representatives, including:

- open-minded problem-solvers who are diplomatic in resolving disagreements,
- staff members reflecting a diverse mix of strengths and expertise, such as an emergency room physician and a staffing director,
- representatives with strong skills in planning, training, and implementing change,
- effective leaders, and
- at least one high-level administrator with clout inside the organization and personal influence in the broader community.

**Step 4. Take time for trust-building and familiarizing.** Air common misperceptions among the participating organizations and ask each organization to summarize its strengths, needs, opportunities, and threats.

**Step 5. Through the working group, coordinate and delegate responsibilities for emergency response.** Give every member of the partnership an important role in implementing emergency response, but make sure that no member feels overburdened.

**Step 6. Through the working group, develop mechanisms to coordinate equipment purchases and share equipment.**

Coordinate purchasing both for compatibility across the partners' organizations and sharing of resources to prevent incompatibility of problems in an emergency event.

**Step 7. Decide on state-of-the-art communications tools all members can use to facilitate coordination during an emergency.** Deploying virtual meetings, dial-in conferences, e-mail, web-based conferencing, and data tracking in the working group lends practice that can be applied during actual emergencies.

**Step 8. Solidify the protocols and coordination mechanisms the partnership develops in a formal memorandum of agreement (MoA).**

**Step 9. Celebrate your mutual success.** Host an annual award gala or other event to acknowledge everyone's hard work and reward those who have devoted extraordinary efforts to collaborating for emergency preparedness.

### OVERCOMING CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

MoAs can be difficult to achieve if the parties are receiving competing advice from their respective attorneys. Suggest that each partner appoint a high-level administrator who is dedicated to the partnership

to manage attorney-to-attorney liaisons and foster good-faith negotiations with the other partners.

The partners should make trust building a primary day-to-day priority throughout the process. Take every opportunity to express respect and appreciation for the other partners' expertise and professionalism.

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This tip sheet draws on the experiences of the Montgomery County, Maryland, Hospital and Public Health Partnership Group (HPHPG). In 2001 the county's Emergency Management Group Hospitals Committee recognized a need to coordinate and standardize protocols for delivering critical services during public health and medical emergencies. The HPHPG formed as a result and continues to meet monthly to discuss the partners' needs and mutually held goals in emergency response planning. In April 2004 the members solidified the partnership through a memorandum of understanding executed by the five hospitals in the county, Kaiser Permanente, the County Fire Administrator, and the County Health Officer.

## Key lessons learned from the Montgomery County hospital-public health partnership:

- Develop a unified response among the partners to potential public health threats.
- Support implementation of an automated system for early detection of illness and disease outbreaks.
- Use a common communication system, such as the web-based Facilities Resource Emergency Database (FRED), to alert all partners and track capacity during a mass-casualty emergency.
- Maintain and upgrade back-up communications systems, such as cell phones and satellite communications, for use if the primary system fails.
- Plan jointly how to alert the public about where to go and what to do in a public health emergency.
- Manage staff shortages with protocols to prevent duplication between hospitals and public health dispensing and vaccination clinics.

### What are the benefits of a hospital-public health partnership? Consider:

- opportunities to have each organization's needs and interests represented at one table
- burden sharing and better delegation of public health and medical responsibilities in the community
- a stronger, unified voice in approaching state and federal agencies
- opportunities to build trust across the public health and medical communities
- coordination and economies of scale in training exercises
- coordination and economies of scale in equipment purchases and usage
- better coordination and reduced redundancy of staff and volunteer deployments
- means for fostering creative thinking, which the partner representatives can in turn pass on to their respective CEOs and spearhead within their own organizations
- practice in using advanced technologies for communicating across organizations

**—in short, a more effective emergency response.**

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